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ABSTRACT

Discussions on how best to improve the professional status of teaching are necessarily based on certain consciously or subconsciously held assumptions of what the terms "profession" and "teaching" are. As a result, disagreements regarding the best way to improve teaching may be more the result of a difference in definition of these two terms than the best way to apply a commonly held view. This paper suggests a typology of definitions for both terms which can be used as an analytical tool for evaluating not only the present professional status of teaching, but also how such status may change as a result of changing definitions. Following an analysis of various definitions of "teaching" and "profession," this paper concludes that teacher training institutions can facilitate the elevation of teaching to professional status by reorganizing teacher training around a knowledge base that rests on testing and research and which has as its focus the improvement of students' academic achievement. (Author/IAH)

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TEACHING AS AN AUTONOMOUS PROFESSION: TEACHER TRAINING IN A NEW KEY

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Paper presented at the Illinois Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (IACTE) conference on April 28, 1989 in Springfield, Illinois

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INTRODUCTION: PAPER OUTLINE

Is teaching as presently practiced by elementary and secondary schoolteachers a profession? This is a question that many writers have dealt with, although not all of them had the same definition, or even any definition, of what either profession or teaching really mean (Blau & Scott, 1965; Bolin & Falk, 1987; Corwin, 1965, 1970; Etzioni, 1969; Howey & Gardner, 1983; Howsam, et. al., 1976; Lortie, 1975; Ornstein, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1987). Discussions on how to best improve the professional status of teaching are necessarily based on certain consciously or subconsciously held assumptions of what the terms "profession" and "teaching" are. As a result, disagreements regarding how to best improve the professional status of teaching may be more the result of a difference in how one defines these two terms, than on how to best apply a commonly held view. In the paper, we suggest a typology of definitions for both terms which may be used as an analytical tool for evaluating not only the present status of teaching, but of how such status may change as a result of changing our definitions.

In the second half of our paper, we discuss the institutional consequences of our view of teaching and profession. Specifically, we discuss how teacher training institutions may be re-organized to best help make teaching a full profession. Throughout the paper we present several possible objections to both our typology of definitions, and teacher training re-organization plan.

POSSIBLE DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM "PROFESSION"

DEFINITION A: Let us assume that by "profession" we mean an occupation whose members are effective in what they do, or at least as effective as is humanely possible at the time. We call this definition, Definition A. Based on this definition, one may conclude that teachers are professionals only to the extent that they are effective in what they do. On the basis of this definition, teachers are professionals on the basis of how effective they are in the achievement of teaching goals. Assuming for a moment that the most important teaching goal is the improvement of student academic achievement, then judging from the success of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in improving student achievement, as contrasted to how efective they could be based on several studies on academic achievement (Averch, et. al., 1974; Boocock, 1980; Coleman, et. al. 1966; Edmonds, 1979;

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Makedon, 1988; National Commission on Excellence on Education, 1983; Wittrock, 1986), one may argue that teachers are not as "professional" in carrying out their teaching goals as they could be.

DEFINITION B: Let us assume that the most important characteristic of a profession is amount of education possessed by its members. Judging from the amount of education that teachers receive, which includes at least a Bachelors degree, one may argue on the basis of this definition that teachers are more professional than all those workers with less education, such as, clerical and most blue collar workers; but less professional than all those with more education, such as medical doctors and lawyers, for whom the entrance requirement is at least a post-graduate degree (at least in the United States).

It may be objected that amount education may not necessarily correlate with effective teaching. In other words, the most effective teachers may not be those with the most education. For example, it has become almost cliche to criticize teachers who have a lot of education, but can't teach. That doesn't mean that anyone with the ability to teach can teach anything, for he may be an excellent methodologist, but know nothing about the substance of what he or she is required to teach. A teacher may acquire degrees or post-graduate education that have litle direct relevance to his work, and are therefore of little help in making him more effective; may have few or no skills in effectively conveying the subject matter, or in motivating his students to learn; or the methods and work conditions in his field may be dictated more by politics or outside pressures, than by knowledge of what works best. To expand on this last possibility, a teacher may even be forced by the circumstances to either conform to the status quo to survive, or quit or start a new learning environment that will best reflect what he knows about effective teaching (Apple, 1985; Boocock, 1980; Glaser, 1978).

DEFINITION C: Let us assume that by "profession" we mean a combination of both Definition A and Definition B, above, that is, an occupation whose members are both effective and well educated. On the basis of Definition C a professional must not only be well educated, and his education relevant to improving his work performance, but he must also be effective. Implied in this definition is the idea that a teacher can't be effective unless he also has the freedom to apply his education. This may be seen as a corollary characteristic of teaching as a profession derived from Definition C.

DEFINITION D: According to Definition D, the most important characteristic of a profession is the autonomy of its members to practice their trade freely. If autonomy is seen in isolation from the characteristics described in earlier definitions, then it may be argued that on the basis of this definition teachers are less

professional than workers with more autonomy over their work, including entrepeneurs and independently employed blue-collar workers; but more professional than workers with less autonomy, such as secretaries.

It may be objected that simply having autonomy doesn't necessarily mean that one will be either effective, or knowledgeable, or willing to apply his knowledge. For example, without either the relevant or "right" education, or the willingness to apply it, teachers will not necessarily help their students learn any better than if they had more autonomy (or, for that matter, less autonomy) than they have now. If the most important goal of teaching is to help improve student academic achievement, a subject to which we shall return, then being merely free to teach as one likes is not a guarantee that one will teach well, or will want to even if he were told how.

DEFINITION E: One may argue that in addition to all of the above mentioned characteristics, a professional must also be remunerated on the basis of his productivity, rather than presumed ability, "connections," years on the job, or other factors unrelated to productivity itself. In the area of teaching, we shall mean by "productivity" those measurable improvements in learning achievement which determine how "productive" teachers have been in certain subject areas, or according to certain standards of measurement. Since at present most teachers are remunerated primarily on the basis of years teaching, and degrees and graduate courses taken, rather than on the basis of "productivity" (or of how much their students actually learned), under Definition E they may be seen as less professional than other more productivity-paid professionals. For example, based on Definition E salespeople who work on a commission basis may be seen as more "professional" than teachers who are paid on the basis, primarily, of seniority.

It may be argued that this last definition, Definition E, is really a corollary to Definition A regarding effectiveness: one's effectiveness as a teacher may be measured by one's productivity. This is another way of saying that a teacher is a professional if paid according to how effective he is. This issue of productivity-based pay may be seen as lying at the heart of the debate regarding merit pay: according to several writers a teacher's merit should be evaluated on the basis of his productivity, and therefore so should his remuneration. The question may be raised, should a teacher's merit be identified exclusively with productivity? If it should, is a teacher more productive if paid according to his productivity (i.e., how much he helped "produce" educated students); or is his productivity more likely to improve if he is paid, as teachers are now, on the basis primarily of seniority? (Barber and Klein, 1983; Rosenholtz and Smylie, 1984; Soar and Soar, 1984). Until we have definite answers to that question we cannot really determine whether under Definition E productivity-related or "merit" pay is a necessary requirement for teaching to

become a full profession.

DEFINITION F: Finally, a definition of profession may be cumulatively seen as a combination of definitions A through E, that is, combine a relevant education, with the willingness to apply it, the freedom or autonomy to do so, job effectiveness, and some form of productivity-based or merit-based pay. The problem with such definition may be that it is too cumulative, and therefore possibly too exclusive, to be true. Several workers may be excluded from being considered professional if they lack even one of the characteristics in this definition. For example, an effective teacher may be be seen as unprofessional if he lacks the right education, the willingness to apply it, the freedom to do so, or a merit-pay system of remuneration.

Conclusion

We conclude that depending on which definition of "profession" we adopt, our view of the professional status of teaching changes. This becomes even more evident as we change our definition of "teaching" to conform to different educational theories. This in turn may cause our conceptions of the professional status of teaching to change or "multiply" by at least as many times as the variety of definitions we employ, or the variety of ways we choose to interpret them.

POSSIBLE DEFINITIONS OF "TEACHING"

The same that was said regarding the term "profession" may be said regarding "teaching:" our discussion of the professional status of teaching hinges on how we define teaching, that is, on what we think teaching is; or, if we disagree with its textbook or someone else's definition, or how it is presently applied, on what we think it should be. Historically, there have been numerous definitions of teaching proposed over the centuries. In the area of philosophy of education alone, different definitions have been proposed by philosophers from different schools of thought, from idealism and realism, to romanticism, pragmatism, existentialism and marxism, to name but a few (Aristotle, 1967; Dewey, 1980; Freire, 1970; Kant, 1904; Locke, 1989; Maritain, 1967; Plato, 1937; Wingo, 1965). There have been others, too many to mention them all, proposed by educational psychologists, practitioners, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, or humanists (Gutek, 1988; Wynne, 1963).

Our definition or philosophy of teaching influences our view of the professional status of teaching: depending on our definition of teaching, our view of its professional status changes. By extension, our view of teaching influences the way we organize education, including our teacher training institutions. If we define teaching to include a variety of academic and non-academic goals, such as, moral development, assimilation into mainstream,

health, obedience to authority, and last, but not least, academic achievement, then the chances that teaching will equally accomplish all of these goals, or any one of them well, are mathematically slimmer than if teaching were to concentrate on only one of these goals. There is also the possibility that our definition of teaching may be so overloaded with contradictory expectations that it is almost impossible to successfully apply in practice. For example, if a definition of teaching includes both academic achievement and obedience to authority, then what is a teacher supposed to do if Johnny insists on going to the library to finish his learning project at a time when all students are supposed to stay in the classroom? Does the teacher make an exception for Johnny and allow him to go, so the goal regarding academic achievement may be accomplished? Or does he ask Johnny to remain in the classroom, so Johnny internalizes the goal regarding respect for authority? If the teacher decides to do one or the other, isn't he in either case sacrificing at least one of the goals of teaching? And if so, is the teacher teaching well if he seems to accomplish one goal, but fail to accomplish the other?

Conclusion: Importance of Definition

We conclude that before we can evaluate the professional status of teaching, we must not only have a clear idea of what teaching and profession are, or why our definitions are any better (or worse) than other people's, but our definitions should also lead to non-contradictory practices on application. In the next section we shall use Venn diagrams to briefly examine how our view of the terms "profession" and "teaching" may determine our view of the professional status of teaching.

HOW RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TERMS "TEACHING" AND "PROFESSION" DETERMINE OUR VIEW OF THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF TEACHING

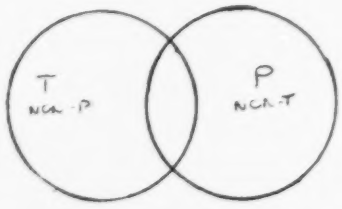
Another way of examining the professional status of teaching may be to represent with Venn diagrams the relation between teaching and profession. These diagrams represent all the possible relations between the two, and therefore may be seen as the most comprehensive way of examining how one may effect the other. The reader first defines the two terms, teaching and profession, and subsequently decides which diagram best represents the relationship between the two. The circles simply help us to realize all the possible relationships which our chosen definitions may have. For example, if teaching is defined simply as "communication of ideas," and profession as "paid work," then the relation between the two might look like Diagram B, below. Although some people involved in communicating ideas are paid, some are not. Alternatively, not all paid work involves the communication of ideas. The two circles representing teaching and profession intersect: some teaching is, and some is not professional, depending on whether such teaching is paid or unpaid communication of ideas.

DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "TEACHING" AND "PROFESSION"

DIAGRAM A:

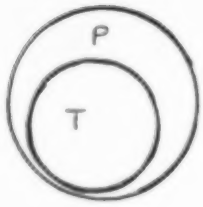
Since the two circles representing teaching and profession in Diagram A do not meet, this diagram means that the two terms, teaching and profession, have nothing in common. According to this diagram, teaching is by definition a non-professional occupation. At the same time, nothing professional or professionally done includes teaching. Of course, whether the two terms, teaching and profession, have anything in common depends ultimately on how we conceptualize either one, or both, of these terms.

DIAGRAM B



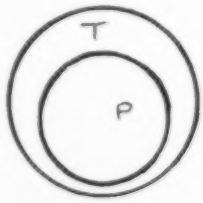
Our understanding of the two terms may be such that they have at least something in common. This means that there may be some aspects of teaching that are "professional" (=P), but some that are not (=Non-P). On the other hand, although some "professional work" involves teaching (=T), some may have nothing to do with it (=Non-T), depending, again, on how we define either teaching or profession.

DIAGRAM C



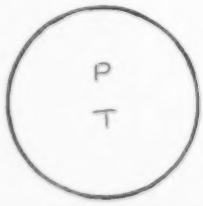
According to this diagram, there are no teaching acts or parts of teaching that are not professional, as the whole of the teaching circle is inside the circle representing professional work. On the other hand, teaching is only one of many other professions inside the profession circle (=NON-T).

DIAGRAM D:



According to this diagram, which is also the most unlikely, there is no professional activity outside teaching, as the whole of the profession circle is inside the teaching circle. At the same time, some parts or kinds of teaching also fall outside the profession circle, that is, they are unprofessional.

DIAGRAM E:



Finally, the two circles representing teaching and profession in this diagram are "coextensive," meaning, all teaching is professional, and all professional work involves teaching (which is also unlikely).

Conclusion

There are probably definitions of teaching and profession to make every relationship depicted in the diagrams, above, come alive. Conversely, the diagrams represent all the possible relations between profession and teaching, and therefore may be used to represent all the possible relationships between any two or more definitions of these two terms.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AND OUR DEFINITIONS

If we design our institutions to give life to our proclaimed beliefs or principles, then knowing our beliefs may be the best predictor of how our institutions are likely to change. To what extent are our definitions the result of our beliefs or values? To the extent that they are, to that extent they indirectly also express agreement or disagreement with the definitions underlying present institutional structures.

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, our intent paper is not so much to defend one set of definitions over another, but to illustrate the consequences of our choices in discussing the professional status of teaching, or in re-organizing our teacher training institutions to reflect our view of teacher professionalism. Since our teacher training institutions reflect our beliefs regarding how teachers should be trained, or at least the beliefs of those who control such institutions, each definition indirectly dictates that our teacher training institutions may have to be re-organized to improve the professional status of teaching.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF TEACHING

In our examination of the professional status of teaching in the second part of our paper, we shall assume that the most important goal of teaching is student academic achievement. This is a common assumption made by most educational researchers who are interested in studying the "effectiveness" of different educational arrangements (Boocock, 1980; Brookover and Lezotte, 1979; Cohen 1983; Edmonds, 1986; Goodlad, 1983; Walberg, 1987; Wittrock, 1986). It follows that in the event there is a conflict between this and other teaching goals (as in our earlier example regarding Johnny's wish to study in the school library), the goal regarding academic achievement takes precedence over every other goal. The only exceptions allowed may be regarding medical emergencies, or the "letter of the law."

A WORKING DEFINITION OF PROFESSION

By "profession" we shall mean very much what our Definition F stated, in the first part of our paper, regarding the meaning of the term profession. That is, by profession we shall mean an

occupation whose members have a relevant education, willingness to apply it, the freedom to do so, and the results to prove it. Regadring the freedom to apply one's education, it means that members of the occupation have control over both micro and macro-management issues. As Amitai Etzioni put it,

> Only if immune from ordinary social pressures and free to innovate, to experiment, to take risks without the usual social repercussions of failure, can a professional carry out his work effectively." (Etzioni, 1969, p.76)

Implied in Etzioni's statement is the idea that teachers must have autonomy to apply their education, including protection from outside social or political pressures to conform.

IS TEACHING A FULL PROFESSION?

In his essay on the "The Balance of Control and Autonomy in Elementary School Teaching," Dan C. Lortie wrote that the reason schoolteaching is not a full profession is because the public perceives teaching as lacking an expert knowledge base that is both esoteric to teaching itself, and proven to effectively help increase student academic achievement (Lortie, 1969). As a result of this lack of a relevant knowledge base, or at least the public perception of such absence, teaching, according to Lortie, also lacks professional autonomy. The public is apparently unwilling to delegate its right to control public school policy to the members of an occupation whose relevant knowledge base is, at least in the public eye, neither more effective, nor much more technical or esoteric than its own. It follows that if teachers were trained to test their theories experimentally to see whether they "work," or at least apply those that have been so tested, then they may eventually develop a knowledge base which might not only be perceived by the public as "professional," but as effective in helping students improve their academic achievement.

TEACHER TRAINING REORGANIZATION PLAN

If our goal is to make teaching a full profession, as the term profession was earlier defined, and as the public presently understands the meaning of the term, then there is no reason why certain steps couldn't be taken in the area of teacher training to help in the realization of that goal. Given the hundreds of experimental studies so far carried out in the area of academic achievement (Wittrock, 1986), there is no reason why our teacher training institutions could not be re-organized around such testing and research. This doesn't mean that humanistic or theoretical studies in education should receive less attention or treatment than research, or than statistical, sociological, or "scientific" studies, but that the two areas should be combined so they can better complement each other.

SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF TEACHER TRAINING RE-ORGANIZATION PLAN

1. ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

   --TESTABLE HYPOTHESES
   --SUPPLY OF IDEAS
   --CRITIQUE OF RESEARCH

2. ROLE OF RESEARCH

   --TESTING OF THEORIES
   --REVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES
   --VALIDITY OF RESEARCH DESIGN
   --APPLICATIONS

3. ROLE OF CURRICULUM, METHODS

   --DEVELOP CURRICULUM/METHODS ON THE BASIS OF TESTED THEORIES
   --DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TESTED AND UNTESTED THEORIES
   --UPDATE METHODS BASED ON NEW RESEARCH

4. ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

   --IMPLEMENT RESEARCH-BASED METHODS AND CURRICULA
   --SECURE NECESSARY FINANCIAL SUPPORT
   --MANAGE HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES
   --LEARN OF THE VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE STYLES

5. CONCLUSION

   --DEVELOP A "PROFESSIONAL" KNOWLEDGE BASE
   --PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE MAY LEAD TO INCREASED AUTONOMY

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